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AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY, AND THE RACE FOR SPACE

Tonight, I feel a great deal of pride--pride in being asked to address you, pride in your accomplishments and pride in standing beside you at the threshold of great opportunity.

I was fortunate enough to be the recipient of an award at a similar natural resources honors convocation at the University of Michigan in 1955, so I can imagine the great personal satisfaction felt by those of you who received awards here tonight. These sparkling additions to your personal resumes will be important in the competition ahead for employment.

Public recognition of the excellence of your performance speaks well of you and of your futures in natural resources. It speaks well for the future of this Nation, too. Tonight we are told, "Here are young leaders capable of carrying on and improving our natural resources conservation programs."

We're all proud of you.

It's exciting to contemplate your futures. This is a challenging and rewarding time to enter the field of natural resources conservation and management.

Don't get me wrong--it's not necessarily an easy time. Job openings in natural resources are not abundant. And budgets are tight. So what's new? I started out my "wildlife management" career by writing camera instruction books, running a railroad freight house, and editing a weekly newspaper!

Remarks by Dr. M. Rupert Cutler, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture for Conservation, Research and Education, at the Annual Awards Banquet of the Department of Forestry and Wildlife Management, the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Massachusetts, April 24, 1978.

But I can tell you with confidence that your skills are needed out in the workaday world--in government and in private industry--as well as in academe. Not everyone will pay you what you think you are worth, of course, and do not expect testimonial dinners on each of the first 10 anniversaries of your employment. But you are needed.

Tonight I will discuss one of many areas in which your skills are needed. That is land use.

Perhaps some of you will murmur, "How dull," when I refer to land use. My answer to that is, "Where have you been lately?" Certainly not at the town meetings or the legislative or congressional sessions in which land use--sometimes under a different name--has brought outspoken partisans nearly to blows in a frenzy of confrontation.

"Where will we put all the people?" shouts one side.

"Not here," shouts the other.

"We've got a right to enjoy the beauty of the countryside, too," say the New Folks. "Well, then, treat it right," say the Old Timers.

America is reshaping its future. Come on in and join the debate. The water's fine. And getting warmer all the time.

Bring your skills with you.

As a citizen, of course, you must be concerned about land use...for your own protection if not just for the good of the community. There is no place you can hide. Just when you find your ideal location to live and work, someone else wants to change the land use either under your feet or next door or just down the road. There is no escaping involvement, even for an uninformed private citizen.

For the especially well-equipped and trained professional, armed with special information useful in land use decisions--such as you--there is more

than an ordinary need for involvement; there is an overriding responsibility for involvement.

Decisions made solely on the basis of short-term economic benefits can be very costly in their ecological, social, and long-term consequences. The pressure for all-out grain production recently, for example, brought millions of acres of marginal farmland into use, necessitating the use of dwindling finite resources--fertilizer, water, natural gas, chemicals, oil and electrical energy.

It also invited more ravaging of topsoil by erosion. Last year, according to a Soil Conservation Service estimate, wind erosion severely damaged more than seven million acres of Great Plains land. For many regions this was the second and third successive years of such damage.

That cannot go on.

What will be the decisions of the '80s, '90s and the early 21st Century?

Today we are witnessing a race for space. Not in the skies above us, but on the land under our feet.

On one hand, we see more people. Growth in America may require 50,000 new housing units a week from now until the year 2000. That means not only housing, but food, roads, industries, airports, sewers, power plants.

On the other hand, an estimated five million acres of rural land are urbanized, idled or covered over with water every year in the United States.

Secretary of Agriculture Bob Bergland calls these two opposing trends a "collision course with disaster."

He is right.

The challenge to you is clear.

Each of you has a responsibility to apply the knowledge and skill of your profession to benefit society. You need to be aware of the world surrounding you, and the nature and direction of public perceptions and expectations. And you will need to apply your science consciously and compassionately, to meet these expectations in the long run.

We must have reliable, updated inventories of all resources, plus realistic projections of future demands.

We must have accurate assessments of land productivity on a multi-resource basis. We must fill the gaps in our knowledge, correct past mistakes in land use, and seek the policies and practices needed to tap the productivity of our lands without impairing the productivity of our basic soil and water resources.

We must realign our priorities in natural resources research, and find ways to speed the results of this research into practice. We must increase the efficiency with which we use our resources, and stretch them. And we must listen to--and respond to--the public.

The population of the United States had doubled in the last 50 years, and may increase another 50 percent in the next 50 years. Americans expect a continuing supply of tangible and intangible products and services from their land and water resources. They demand a cleaner, healthier, more attractive environment. They believe that the expertise and the funds--their tax dollars--are available to accomplish this. And they look to their leaders to transform the expectations into reality.

Soon, they will be looking to many of you to accomplish this.

Land use--the allocation of land and associated water resources to various uses--has surfaced as the major national issue in natural resources

policy. All concerned--the Federal government, the states, industry and private citizens--seem to agree on this. What they have not been able to agree on so far is how to develop any sort of national agreement--let alone a national policy--on land use.

In the last decade, we've seen the issue surface in Congress--over and over again. Surface--and then like a stranded whale--die. The debate reached its high mark between 1970 and 1975, when there were active bills under continuous consideration. The predication was that any day a Federal bill would emerge. It did not.

What happened? Why don't we have a Federal land use policy today?

Basically, the bills took the wrong road--and wound up at no destination. The bills which Congress considered in the early '70s would have created a national land use office in the Department of the Interior to relay Federal grants out to states which had established land management programs under Federal guidelines. The programs envisioned a pyramid, with States taking control of certain types of land management decisions from the local governments, and the Federal government sitting at the top of the apex.

This did not agree with the basic American tradition of personal property rights as our citizens perceive them...or with the tradition of the lead role of States and local government in land-use regulation. Our rural citizens--the farmers, ranchers, and forest owners--were particularly wary of increasing government control, or elevating land-use decisions to higher levels. They still are. And I don't blame them.

The debate over legislation became so emotional and so bitter that the very words, "land use," as they were expressed then, became tainted.

How can we resolve the land use issue?

First, there is no such thing as a Federal land use planning function for private lands. Nor should there be. Nor do I advocate that one be created. The Federal role is primarily an education, information and technical assistance role.

Apart from our obvious planning responsibilities on Federal lands such as the National Forests, we do not believe that land use planning at the Federal level--or even the state level--is possible, let alone advisable. Our country is too big, too complex, too diverse--and land use decisions must always, in the final analysis, be acceptable at the local level--to at least the majority of the landowners and users who must carry them out--if the plan is to be translated into action.

There are two schools of thought about land use planning. The first says that the planning should be done only by skilled professional planners. The second says that ordinary people make good decisions if they know the outcome of their actions.

The Department of Agriculture subscribes to the second philosophy. So did Thomas Jefferson, who said:

"I know of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion."

The Forest Service has had an excellent innovative public involvement program for almost a decade, and the Soil Conservation Service is making good headway in this direction now by opening channels of communication with a wide variety of groups, stimulated by the requirements of the new Soil and Water Resources Conservation Act. The public has been involved in many major Forest Service decisions, including those dealing with roadless areas, grazing, off-road

vehicles, and the Renewable Resources Assessment and Program required by the Forest and Rangelands Renewable Resources Planning Act. The SCS will provide similar public involvement opportunities as it implements not only the Resources Conservation Act, but the Rural Water Quality Program and the Rural Abandoned Mine Program, both of which are designed to serve environmental quality-related constituencies as well as rural landowners.

Secretary Bergland recently established a Departmentwide program in USDA that will encourage citizen participation in all our activities and decision-making processes.

The public is an essential partner with us in making our natural resources decisions. But land use questions are complex, and it is often very difficult for people to see the future ramifications of their actions. If, as resource professionals, we want to insure that decisions are made by the informed rather than the uninformed, by intent rather than by default, we must be armed with the information and interpretation that our citizen-decisionmakers need.

The key element of land use decisionmaking consists of trade-off analysis--people need to understand both what is lost and what is gained by a proposed action.

We, as resource professionals, can help people understand some of the resource implications behind those trade-offs...and help them identify the groups or individuals in society who win and lose in each case.

For example, people viewed wetlands as "waste" lands for many years. They failed to recognize the important ecological--and economic--values that were lost whenever wetlands were destroyed. Today, we are aware of those losses, and USDA professionals, in the Soil Conservation Service especially, are working with people not only to prevent damage to wetlands including natural streams, but to take positive steps to protect and enhance their values. We're seeking non-

structural alternatives to dams, for example, and giving wildlife equal billing with other program objectives.

We're also looking out for the welfare of prime forestlands, undeveloped flood plains, productive coastal zones and other special lands.

USDA agencies, working in tandem, are ready to do that job. Land use planning assistance--with the emphasis on the "assistance"--gets a high priority in Bob Bergland's USDA.

We at USDA have four basic roles:

1. The first is the "convener" function--to get people together to identify their local issues, work out practical "alternative futures" for their community, and decide what their community really wants. Cooperative Extension Service staff specialists in community resource development are providing this service in many States today.

2. The second is providing data, information and interpretation. We don't stop after just giving people lots of facts, or numbers that are meaningless to them. We use our professional skills to explain what those facts really mean--the resources involved, the people affected, the economic and social costs, and the alternatives. Again, Extension's agricultural economists are involved, together with SCS, Forest Service and other USDA agency specialists.

3. We are changing our programs to insure the most beneficial impact on people and land. We won't encourage actions which tear up local growth patterns, or inject our goals instead of the communities'. What we do favor is desirable land management and desirable environmental impacts, to protect our agriculture-forestry land base, and we want USDA programs to contribute to those goals, not detract from them.

Several USDA agencies, as well as Land Grant universities' extension and experiment station faculty members are "on call" to assist local communities in their search for the best land-use goals, given local opportunities and constraints.

4. We also want to help protect the interests of rural people as well as agriculture in Washington. When the interests of rural communities, rural citizens, and agricultural producers are threatened by a proposed Federal action, we will act as advocates for that interest. Such issues may involve highways, utilities, energy developments, or many similar proposals. And usually there is a great deal of Federal money involved. We've been very active in this area recently, and we will become even more active in the future.

Our prime farmland policy is--if you'll excuse the pun--a prime example. Through our actions, and with the aid of the President's Council on Environmental Quality, we've made analysis of impacts on prime lands an important part of Federal environmental impact statements. As a result, we've become involved in more and more land use disputes where prime farmland may be lost or damaged.

States in the Northeast, as you probably know, are leaders in defending the proper use of prime farmland.

Massachusetts and New Jersey have established model demonstration programs, experimenting with incentives and financing mechanisms to prevent the loss of prime agricultural land. Vermont requires that the impact of proposed developments on prime agricultural lands be considered during environmental permit processes.

And the Coalition of Northeastern Governors is backing a bill in the Congress to establish a national policy concerning agricultural land. We certainly agree that the coalition's concerns are extremely important. The continued permanent conversion of about a million acres of prime farmland each year to other uses is

a definite threat to the Nation's ability to produce ample supplies of food and fiber if allowed to continue unchecked. . .and is particularly important from local or regional supply standpoints and with respect to the impact on special crops grown in very limited areas.

We at USDA strongly support legislation which would establish an Agricultural Land Review Commission to report on the agricultural land situation within 3 years. Secretary Bergland has been expressing his personal interest in such a study since he became Secretary.

We, as Federal policymakers--and those of you here tonight who will soon become resource professionals--must never lose sight of the fact that our land base cannot be separated into neat, independent parcels labeled "urban," "suburban" or "rural." All three emanate from a natural resources endowment and unique locational attributes. Policies overlap. For instance, should a Federal agency finance projects which will take prime agricultural land out of production?

Furthermore, no matter where your career takes you--whatever professional and ethical choices you may make--remember that people and natural resources are inextricably linked.

President Carter recognized this when he announced his new urban policy on March 27. Although designed to reverse what he calls the "deterioration of urban life" in the United States, the Administration emphasizes that the concept of "distressed" areas applies in some cases to both urban and rural areas. Actually, in many cases, all that separates them is an administrative line drawn years ago.

I urge you to follow changing policies on urban, as well as rural, development. Both have land management implications; for example, an inner city renaissance nationwide would slow the suburban sprawl eating up our farmlands.

It could well be that President Carter's urban policy will be more important in the Northeast than anywhere else in the country. This region is a total mix of urban and rural--and it is the region where the heaviest urbanization pressures are pressing on the most limited supply of prime land.

The Administration proposes targeting urban programs to areas with the greatest need. It's generally agreed that the heavily populated Northeast and Midwest would receive the bulk of the funds.

Many of you here today probably will remain in the Northeast; it's where your "roots" are. Here, your work with natural resources will be very rewarding--but not without difficulty. The people of the Northeast have been very progressive in land use planning--they've had to be, because the urban pressures here are at their greatest, while prime land is the most limited.

Yet I sense a growing uneasiness in the Northeast--one that is directly tied to land and resources. Perhaps it's inevitable that the section which was first settled is the first to feel the pressures of a growing society. I think the Northeast--with its hardy, independent people--feels uneasy about depending on transportation and other technologies to bring them the benefits of resources from other parts of the country. In a sense, the Northeast is on the tail-end of many of the country's delivery systems. You know that almost everything costs more by the time it gets to the Northeast--except perhaps Boston baked beans, Maine potatoes, and Vermont maple syrup.

Last winter, when a heavy winter snow virtually cut off the interstate highway into Boston, grocery shelves were depleted quickly, and the area's dependence on the delivery system and resources from other parts of the country was brought into sharp focus. Since that time, this region has led the Nation in developing state and local programs to preserve its dwindling supply of agricultural land, to protect its remaining capability to be self-sufficient.

The Northeast has its own special problems--as does every section of the country. But, I would venture to guess that there are more universal problems than unique problems. As resource professionals, you will have a hand in seeking the answers, working with the public to accommodate its needs, and to reconcile people with natural resource supplies and constraints.

In 1903, President Theodore Roosevelt challenged the Society of American Foresters with a message uniquely appropriate for an audience of new natural resources management professionals. I would like to use those words in closing:

"You are engaged in a calling whose opportunities for public service are very great. Treat that calling seriously; remember how much it means to the country as a whole.

"The profession you have adopted is one which touches the Republic on almost every side--political, social, industrial, commercial; to rise to its level you will need a wide acquaintance with the general life of the nation, and a viewpoint both broad and high.

"You must instill your own ideals into the mass of your fellowmen, and at the same time show your ability to work with them in practical and business fashion. This is the condition precedent to your being of use to the body politic."

Good night--and good luck in all your endeavors.

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